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SUBJECT: Clandestine Radio Indignant, Moscow
Reticent on Events in Iran

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CLANDESTINE RADIO INDIGNANT, MOSCOW RETICENT ON EVENTS IN IRAN

The Baku-based "National Voice of Iran" (NVOI), purporting to speak for the Iranian people, has departed sharply from the line taken in official Soviet media to denounce the Islamic regime's actions against the country's "progressive forces"--an NVOI euphemism for the communist Tudeh Party. While NVOI has lambasted some Iranian officials as "fanatics," the official Radio Moscow has confined itself to meager and essentially neutral reportage on the unrest and bloodshed in Iran. But the touchy state of Soviet-Iranian relations is reflected in a Soviet rejoinder to an Iranian complaint about false reporting in Moscow radio's Persian service.

"NATIONAL VOICE" During the months-long power struggle between
COMMENTARY deposed President Bani-Sadr and his opponents
 in the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), NVOI
repeatedly sided with the clerics and denounced Iranian "liberals." In the past few weeks, particularly since the 28 June explosion at the IRP headquarters, NVOI has been waxing indignant over the executions of leftist sympathizers and the arbitrary treatment of the Tudeh Party by the surviving clerical rulers. In line with its longstanding reluctance to identify itself with the Tudeh, NVOI has not used the party's name in connection with the current situation, but it has named the leftist organization Mojahedin-e Khalq as the object of official attacks. Thus a 26 June talk charged that some Iranian officials, owing to their "fanaticism, superficiality, and monopoly-seeking," had unfairly branded "every member" of the Mojahedin-e Khalq as "atheists and hypocrites" when many of the organization's members were in fact only "misled due to inexperience and lack of revolutionary knowledge." As for the fate of these youths, it said, Iran "speaks only with a voice of force."

NVOI's uncharacteristic criticism of Iran's clerical rulers, clearly reactive to fundamentalist capriciousness toward the Tudeh Party, has come close to a wholesale denunciation of the Islamic regime. A 17 July commentary lambasted "fanatical" individuals "who, unfortunately, are not few in our country" for refusing to tolerate "even listening to the views of revolutionary organizations that support" the regime. Another jab was aimed directly at the ruling IRP and the party's renewed intolerance of leftist opposition.

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The commentary perfunctorily condemned the bombing of IRP headquarters, neglecting to mention that the regime had blamed the Mojahedin-e Khalq for the blast. It went on to ask why "officials" had kept silent about the "occupation of the offices and the banning of the newspapers of other organizations loyal to the Islamic Republic and the Imam's line." Why, it asked, are these acts "intolerable for you but not for others?"

Iran's Council of Guardians has also come in for criticism. A 14 July NVOI talk took issue with the council's exclusion of all but four of the aspirants for the post of president and declared that judging candidates "merely from a religious viewpoint" could not "secure the demands arising from the glorious revolution." In a harsh attack on the rule of Iran by mullahs, the commentary asserted that the Iranian people did not stage a revolution to preserve the "plundering domination of imperialism" in the country "in another form," nor did they wish to perpetuate the rule of "fanaticism, oppression, and superficiality." NVOI also reacted to the council's action on 19 July in excluding Tudeh Party candidates from the forthcoming Majlis elections. A 20 July commentary denounced "responsible officials and government figures" who "took advantage of their monopolistic position" and disqualified members of the "steadfastness front"--a grouping NVOI did not further identify. NVOI called it "the height of injustice" to place candidates of "progressive and revolutionary parties and organizations" on the level of the former Rastakhiz party of the late shah.

IRANIAN PROTEST OVER MOSCOW REPORT Scanty coverage of the "deteriorating" Iranian situation in Moscow's official media has consisted chiefly of neutral reports, generally unattributed, on riots, bombings, and "sabotage." But one recent Soviet report ventured into a sensitive area in referring to the movement for autonomy in Kordestan--and drew a prompt Iranian protest:

+ PRAVDA's Ankara correspondent A. Filippov, in a dispatch published on 15 July and broadcast in Moscow radio's Persian-language service the same day, cited unidentified "reports from Tehran" about "increasingly frequent instances of nonfulfillment of orders" by Iranian military personnel concerning "punitive operations" in Kordestan. Observing that there is a "continuing armed struggle for autonomy" for that region, Filippov added--again without attribution--that eight Iranian officers and men had been shot for "attempting to go over to the Kurdish rebels' side."

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+ Iranian Government spokesman Nabavi picked up the reference to the shooting of the officers as an example of "false" and "unfavorable" reports broadcast by the Soviet radio which had prompted Iran to "seek an explanation." Nabavi's complaint, reported in a Tehran dispatch in the 21 July FINANCIAL TIMES of London, was made at a press conference on 20 July. It was not, however, included in Tehran domestic radio's account of the press conference.

+ Moscow responded to Nabavi in a commentary broadcast in Persian on the 22d--heatedly but obliquely, without making it clear what Nabavi's complaint had been about. The commentary said obscurely that Nabavi had deliberately "enhanced" the contents of several news items "prepared by the Iranian press and radio" as a pretext to "attack Moscow's policies." The commentary thus implicitly defended the Filippov dispatch as having simply replayed Iranian media reports. It did not acknowledge that Nabavi had complained specifically about Moscow radio or that his complaint related to the Kurdish situation. It did, however, defend the programming of Moscow radio's Persian service, which it claimed had long been under attack from VOA, the BBC, and other propaganda organs of "Iran's enemies."

The squabble is reminiscent of Soviet-Iranian public acrimony last year over a variety of bilateral issues. Commentary in Moscow radio's Persian service continues to flail the United States for alleged pressure on and conspiracies against Iran but has hewed to this relatively safe, stock propaganda theme and generally avoided addressing sensitive issues in Soviet-Iranian relations. The Iranian reaction to the Filippov dispatch, prompted by its raising of the Kurdish issue, demonstrated how close to the surface the strains in Soviet-Iranian relations have again become.